

Reflection of Diasporic Sensibility in Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag*

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Abstract

Diaspora is a disarticulation of a community or an individual from one geographical region to another geographical region. Indian English literature is replete with numerous diasporic issues such as rootlessness, identity crisis, homesickness, conflict between tradition and modernity etc. Amit Chaudhuri is remarkable for his distinctiveness of language which speaks to the readers and paves a ground for them to move forward. His works are coated in Indian values and Bengali Sensibility. Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag* (1993) Explores an Oxford student's memories of his family and his singing teacher in a foreign land, to which he is unable to relate to.

KEY WORDS: diaspora, alienation, rootlessness

The term diaspora comes from an ancient Greek word meaning "to scatter about". And that is exactly what the people of a diaspora do- they scatter from their homeland to places across the globe, spreading their culture as they go (web). Homi Bhabha, "Dissemination, Time, Narration, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", speaks about a "time of gathering"- gathering on the edge of foreign cultures. He says: "the emergence of the later phase of the modern nation, from the mid-nineteenth century, is also one of the most sustained periods of mass migration within the west, and colonial expansion in the east" (290). Nostalgia with a curious attachment to the homeland's traditions, religions and languages gave birth to diaspora literature. In other words, the sense of yearning for the motherhood is the most overwhelming sentiment of the Indian diaspora. Martin A. Halvorson – Taylor says in *Diaspora Literature*, "Diaspora" refers to the dispersion of people from their homeland. A simple definition of diaspora literature, then would be works that are written by authors who live outside their native land (web). Some of the most prominent diasporic Indian writers are V. S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry and Amit Chaudhuri. These writers

seem to be pre-occupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to be located in new cultures.

Diaspora causes the dislocation and locations of cultures and individuals harp on memories. An immigrant faces a new society and he encounters the new culture. He does not know which culture should have to be adopted. During this phase of time the sojourner has to face rootlessness, identity crisis, home-sickness, conflict between tradition and modernity etc. The immigrant survives by nostalgia for the past, for it sustains memory, even creates memory. One such work that gives voice to diasporic sensibility is Amit Chaudhuri's *Afternoon Raag*(1993).

Amit Chaudhuri is one of the versatile writers of Indian English Literature. He is a well-known poet, novelist essayist and also a good singer. He writes his novels in finely regulated language. His writings are striking and touches the heart of his readers. His works are coated in Indian values and Bengali Sensibility. He is remarkable for his distinctiveness of language which speaks to the readers and pave a ground for them to move forward. *Afternoon Raag* is a semiautobiographical novel as the writer himself went through the feelings of rootlessness, identity crisis and homesickness. The love for homelands produce the diaspora, it is the space the diasporian belongs to, and identifies himself completely with it. Writers of the diaspora come alongwith their characters who leave their homeland run from pillar to post, crossing the bounderies of time and money to become one with their new surrounding but yearn to return home at an appropriate time.

In *Afternoon Raag*, Amit Chaudhuri explores an Oxford student's memories of his family and his singing teacher in a foreign land, to which he is unable to relate to. Through nostalgia he visits his homeland at intervals which gives him a sense of relief. Chaudhuri depicts the state of mind of a youngman coming to terms with lonliness, nostalgia and alienation in a different way. The narrator feels so aloof and yearns to be mingled up by the culture he was brought up in. He is not able to adjust in the new culture and longs for his homeland and his parents. The narrator's friend Sharma is an Indian and the narrator uses this Indianness and nostalgia to overcome the alienation , homesickness in an unknown land. But it is the nostalgia of their cultures which brings them together. They never met each other on their own land but in Oxford they are good friends and provide feelings of home to each other. The narrator wants to overcome his nostalgia and alienation so that he says:

We made appointments and did not keep them; we made appointments to

discuss when we might meet; we liked each other but were occupied, like children, with other things to do. Sometimes I am nostalgic for that make believe busyness, full of innocence, of having 'other things to do', the prelapsarian background of lectures, bookshops, friends, our lives spent generously and routinely like rain-showers, stopping and starting again.(198)

The narrator likes the company of Sharma but does not allow him to disturb his world of sad longings, loneliness and stillness. The two women, Shehnaz and Mandira, who were "waiting to happen" to him(126). He stumbles in and out of love with the two but both of them are not able to provide him the sense of belonging for him and he is not able to relate to.

Strange place, Oxford, and strange discoveries one makes within it!

Strange students' rooms, with their own, always slightly unfamiliar, dimensions"(255).

At last the author returned to Calcutta, his homeland from England. When the author reached to the airport of Calcutta, he analysed that he has come here with his parents for his holidays but this time he has finally to stay with his parents in Calcutta.

Amit Chaudhuri's novel *Afternoon Raag* is significant for its re-creation of an overseas student's state of mind during his three years visit at Oxford. The novel shows the feelings of alienation, rootlessness and nostalgia. The narrator, who is uprooted from his original roots, is not able to relate to the new culture easily. Diasporic writing occupies a great significant place between countries and cultures. Indian diasporic writing is a powerful network connecting the entire globe. According to an article "Diaspora Literature with Special Reference to the Indian English Literature", Diaspora, is therefore, scattering of the seed in the wind, the fruits of which are a new creation and a flight to survive. Every diasporic movement holds a historical significance, as it carries within itself the kernel of the nation's history. Diaspora is a journey towards self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. There is an element of creativity present in the diasporic writings and this creation stands as a compensation for the many losses suffered(web).

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